

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE WAUCHOPE COMMUNITY

Hastings Street Fig Trees, Block 2, Young to Bain Streets

Thursday, 22 September 2010

The Fig trees in Hastings Street, Wauchope have been the centre of controversy and concern for some time. They are not a suitable street tree and have an aggressive and damaging root system.

Past Councils have agonised over the future of the trees for years. The trees in Block 1 (High to Young Streets) have had their root systems cut on a regular basis. Consequently, potential damage in this commercial block of Hastings Street is more limited. Therefore, Council opted to continue to maintain the trees and do landscaping and street works.

Unlike Block 1, past Councils have not carried out maintenance to the Fig trees in Block 2 (Young to Bain Streets). Tree roots have caused major damage to residential homes, as can be seen by the photographs. The damage is extensive and is getting worse.

Because of the cumulative impact of past inaction, Council is now faced with potential legal and insurance liability if nothing is done.

Clearly, the ongoing damage to public infrastructure and private homes cannot be allowed to continue.

I fully understand that some people are passionate about tree preservation and so is Council. That is why we have a Tree Preservation Policy and removal is a last resort.

We have to be practical and balance the responsibility for tree preservation with the impact on residents who are directly affected and the broader financial cost to our ratepayers across the entire Local Government area.

Those that have mounted a campaign to have the trees retained have lobbied for support and this is a legitimate and responsible tactic. What is disappointing is that many of the people who have contacted the Council, including some who reside outside our area, have failed to mention the quality of life and the financial impact on property owners in Block 2. The tone and personal nature of some of the comments relates more to emotion than fact.

The claim that the damage might be caused by other trees cannot be substantiated.

Council has spoken to a number of residents on several occasions. We have been shown examples of the damage caused to their properties. The extent of the root growth is staggering and stories of constant plumbing works to clear drains, tree roots in bathrooms lifting tiles and raw effluent in backyards, reaffirms the need for urgent action.

It is unacceptable to leave these residents in this situation and to expose all our ratepayers to possible legal and insurance claims.

The cost associated with the retention of the trees and cutting of the roots in Block 2 has been estimated at \$25,000 and would need to be repeated at least every three or four years over the remaining life of the Figs. As such, the total cost could exceed \$250,000. This option is problematic because it has the potential to increase root growth due to a higher availability of water and nutrients in this zone.

The installation of root barriers would cost approximately \$60,000. However, this option is not without issues. The root barrier lip which is required to be above ground level is a trip hazard for pedestrians and the seven year warranty is voided if the lip is damaged by, for example, vehicle movements. Also, the capacity to compact the road base adjacent to the root barrier is limited and as a result, the condition of the road pavement will deteriorate quickly. If the barriers fail after seven years, replacement at Council's cost would be necessary.

The costs associated with the removal of the Fig trees have been estimated at \$20,000 and includes removal of all tree debris from the site.

As indicated at the time of the recent Council decision, eleven advanced Brush Box trees of about seven metres in height will replace the Fig trees, with streetscaping to be programmed later.

The purpose of this letter is to provide the community with an assessment of the position Council has to resolve and the factors guiding the final decision.

Although there is a Council resolution to remove the trees, Council has not acted on it to date to allow some further options to be explored. Whatever the ultimate outcome, Council will and must act in the interests of the majority of its ratepayers and those residents impacted adversely by the Fig trees.

Garry Payne AM
ADMINISTRATOR



Above: Tree root under Block 2 property, Hastings Street



Above: Tree root damage to bathroom, Block 2, Hastings Street



Above: Tree root damage to front fence, Block 2, Hastings Street



Above: Extensive unmanaged fig tree root growth in Block 2, Hastings Street

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